

**Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project**  
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**Shannon Welles**  
**Assistant General Manager, Showbox**  
**Music Venue / Complex**

**Narrator:** Shannon Welles

**Interviewers:** Emily Silks

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**EMILY SILKS 00:00:16**

Oh, I see I got a little pop up. Yeah. Okay, I hit 'Continue'. We're good. Cool. ,All right, we are here. This is Monday, May 3, and it's 3:07 pm. And, my name is EMILY. I'm here with SHANNON. And, we're both in Seattle. We're both communicating through this ZOOM platform. And, this is for the project, Musical Work in the Time of COVID-19. And— so Shannon, I think the first thing I'd like to ask you is just a little bit about your work that you do. And, maybe you could go through a typical work week before the pandemic, and then we can get to the pandemic later.

**SHANNON WELLES 00:00:56**

OK, I am the Assistant General Manager of the Showbox [music] venues in Seattle. And, I took that job in January, right before the pandemic hit. So, I didn't have it for very long by the time that pandemic hit, but previous to that I was a house manager at the Showbox. I just went up a notch. So, my typical day (*pause*) I worked a lot of shows. So, some days, I would come into the office a little bit and do some office work and see the, you know, the people who work in the office, whether that's like booking or ticketing or marketing, we would have weekly meetings where we get together and talk about upcoming shows, we did a lot of (*pause*) kind of like HR stuff I did anyway. Like hiring and— staff issues and disciplinary things, all of that there was definitely an HR component. And, then the other part would be actual on site at the venues (*pause*) either doing any kind of maintenance or supply things or actually running shows. So, half of my job was managing events at night.

**EMILY 00:02:13**

Wow— And, so, now let's go to, Okay, March pandemic happened? Can you tell me a little bit about the transition from like, everything is open to everything is closed? How long was that timeline? And, like, what was it like for the staff that or what was it from your perspective? And, then what did you pick up from the staff who were also involved?

**SHANNON 00:02:40**

So— I think we started hearing (*pause*) things a couple of weeks before we actually shut down. And, so we had some private events scheduled with some major corporations, and they started canceling them. And, so that was the first hint that something was coming because they were— events where people would come from all over the country or even the world. And, so we started to see that world travel was shutting down a bit. And, then people just didn't want to travel across—and this was before we even had cases in Seattle, they were starting to cancel these events. So, that was like a hint that something was coming.

**EMILY 00:03:18**

That was early March?

**SHANNON 00:03:21**

That was probably like late February, early March. So, it was a few weeks. And, I remember thinking like, "Really? you are canceling that because of a pandemic in China?" Like I, I was I didn't, it wasn't like, I was a skeptic. I'll just say that. Like, I am a skeptic. And, so I was like, "Really, that seems a little excessive." But, then I guess that's the global nature, right? And, these companies have people that travel all over the world. And, so then, March, my last show I worked was March 6. And, so, we had already had cases here. By the end, I believe, I don't remember when the first cases hit Seattle. (*pause*) And, I remember— So attendance was dropping at shows. Usually, we would have like on an average pre pandemic, like maybe 10% of the tickets we sell the people don't show up, but this was becoming like 30% (*pause*) 40%. So it was it was really noticeable. The venue's felt empty compared to the amount of tickets that we sold, and we were getting a lot of questions about refunds and stuff like that. And, so the last show I worked with on March 6, and I remember being afraid. I remember thinking, - "This doesn't feel safe at all." And, it was an electronic show, which is a lot of intoxicated people and a lot of bodily fluids. (*laugh*) I was thinking like, all the people who work like the security guards, always the bartenders, the people who are really in there and the attendance right, they have to clean the restrooms. I was just thinking likes, "Too me bodily fluids like this is not safe" And, so— March 13 was the shutdown by the governor on (*pause*) capacities over 250. And, so that was pretty, we're pretty much done. So there was a show that was supposed to load in [The time during which musicians start carrying all of their gear into a club or venue for a show] that day, and we're like "Don't load in." And— so that was the start, and I remember thinking—you know, we're talking about it in the office, because I came to the office, we were all waiting for the announcement. And so, then we're like, "Okay, what, what do we do now? Like, how long is this gonna be like, Is it going to be two weeks? Is it going to be a month?" and I remember, one of our vice presidents, he's like, 'This is gonna be like, a year.' And, I was like, "No, it's not," you know, so well, he was right. And, I was wrong. So, I mean, I just remember, there was a lot of fear, you know, amongst the staff, like, 'What does this mean?' And, 'Okay, we're not going to work, what am I going to do for money?' Uncertainty, there's— that I mean, this whole thing has just been about uncertainty. So— so, the initial things I did for like, the first couple months, was just help people get unemployment. And, figuring out how all of that worked, and how to best be a resource for staff for food resources, rent resources, public health type stuff, and unemployment and try to figure out how are people going to survive? So, that was what I did for about three months, and then I was furloughed. So— I've been out of work for 10 months. And, today's my first day back after 10 months. [EMILY: Whoa!] I haven't been—

**EMILY 00:06:51**

So, you're working? So, now you're on payroll again?

**SHANNON 00:06:55**

Yeah. As of today, I've just resumed my job.

**EMILY 00:06:58**

Wow, congratulations. And, so I haven't been here in this office for, I mean, almost 14 months now, like 13 and a half months. So, it's really weird. I mean, there's nobody here. There's one other person here. And, the three months that you were working, when the pandemic started, were you working from home? Um—I was working from home, I worked in the office for maybe two more days and then worked from home and I was on a reduced salary during that time. And, then got furloughed. Did everybody from Showbox get furloughed at that point?

**SHANNON 00:07:38**

Nearly every person, they were, *(pause)* a few people, maybe like six people that remained working, but they were on reduced capacity or hours or something. Yeah. Or wages. You know, like, I think they, it was a 20% reduction. But actually they might have gone down lower for the people that actually stayed. It might have been like 50%. But I'm not 100% sure about that.

**EMILY 00:08:08**

And—I'm curious, during that time, especially maybe three, right when it started or you know, right around now, are bands kind of reaching out again? Or did musicians or whoever the touring or booking agents are did they cancel? Like—I guess, did you have to tell the musicians that this venue is closed? Or did they do it themselves? No, we had to because every state was different. And, so, and, we were the first ones, because we had the first cases in Seattle. So, we were, we were the first. *(pause)* So yeah, I mean, the booking agents, they, they just contacted people. And, so what happened was, people moved shows—just like a couple of weeks, then it was a couple months. And, then it was six months, some of these shows just moved, over and over. And, so they didn't outright cancel most shows, they just postponed them indefinitely. Because if you postpone them, you don't have to do mass refunds, because the show is still gonna happen. But, so—some artists just flat out canceled. So, it's the decision of the artist, whether or not to cancel or postpone. And, so most of them would rather just postpone. And, because nobody knew what was gonna happen, they might have been able to continue their tour three months down the line, but then it just became more and more clear. So, a lot of bands just rescheduled the show for a year later. But now we're up to the year part [One year of the closure of the venue] and some of those shows now have to get moved again. So, the booking agents actually stayed on to work because all they do is move shows. All pandemic—that's, that's what they do. They're like 'Alright, well, let's try six months from now.' And yeah, so I mean, they've been working the whole time. They contact the agents basically. And, so now we're kind of at the year long mark, do you have any, like, any plans. What's Showbox doing now? Can you see that far in the future or when things might be opening?

**SHANNON 00:10:18**

Shows are being booked for fall, September, October, November and next year. But—that's not to say that those shows won't be moved, you know. So, I think the hope is that by September—we can reopen at full capacity. So, at this point, like we're not doing, like a less capacity show, because we can't operate a venue at half capacity. So, it's just not possible. [EMILY: Right] And, *(pause)* yeah, so I mean, that's the hope, I think, is September. Unless, like, awesome things happen, and everyone gets vaccinated, and we can reopen sooner than I think we would. But—I mean, that you can't plan for anything. That's the problem with this whole thing is because, I mean, we might be going back to phase two tomorrow. [EMILY: I heard about that.] So, we just bounce around from phase to phase and you can't operate a business that way. And, it's not, you're not going to reopen for two weeks and bring all your staff back and do all —of that you are going to be part of rehiring people. You're not going to do that to then close down three weeks later. Like we're, we're just not going to reopen until we're ready. It's time, you know, where we're not bouncing around. And, we can bring people back safely. Because that's definitely a key concern is that the staff is safe, and other people, the artists are safe, and the people who come to shows are safe.[?Inaudible?}]

**EMILY 00:12:04**

So, I think I'd like to pivot now to talk a little bit about some of the fundraising things that you've been involved with. Um, yeah. So, if you want to speak to any of the organizations that you're working with, or the ways that you're trying to help Showbox stay alive, or any of the other Seattle venues remain open post pandemic. Yeah, so I've been part of a lot of different things. So, that's what I did when I stopped working, I just basically had like a full time volunteer job with like four different organizations. But a lot of the same people overlap between all of these things. So, I'll tell you about the two kinds of advocacy things first, and then I'll talk about the different fundraisers that we've done.

**SHANNON 00:12:52**

One is the Washington Nightlife Music Association.[Comprised of independent music venues, local artist organizations, and other music stakeholders and was created in response to the COVID-19 crisis] So, that started right away, like the day of the Governor's [Jay Inslee] announcement, Kate Becker, who's the Creative Economy Director for King County, she called an emergency meeting with all these venue people in Seattle. And, we went and met over at Neumos [mid size music venue complex includes Runaway Bar and Barboza] at the Runaway Bar right next door. So, we went over there to talk about what it meant and the public health stuff. And, she said, 'You all need to organize. Like all of your venue, people need to organize because this is going to be a big deal. And, in order to navigate it like you need to have some sort of power, like collective power, and you're all going to need each other' and she was totally right. So, maybe two weeks later, Stephen Severin from Neumos, he convened a meeting and we started meeting, honestly, sometimes multiple times a week. It became every week. It's a little less frequent now, but that's what it is. Yeah.

**EMILY 00:14:03**

How many people were there at those meetings initially? And, did it grow over time? Well, it was really big in the beginning, like there were probably like 80 to 100 people on the calls and then— and then they weren't all venue people but I would call them music ecosystem people for sure. And, they kind of dropped off over time when it became more about the venues. And, so now there's probably like— 30 to 40 people who are, you know, kind of regularly engaged and then I would say there's maybe like 10 people that are really all in, you know, that have given their all. And, I'm proud to say that at least half of them are venue workers and they're not venue owners. So, the venue workers really stepped up. Like there are a few of them around town. And I'll say their names because it's important: Michael Gill at the Central Saloon and Leigh Bezezekoff from the Tractor and Craig Jewel who's actually Well, he's an owner. But he was amazing . He's in Bellingham. Jordan Swider, who works for El Corazon. Those are the three venue workers. And, I count myself as a venue worker, but [?Inaudible?] so the four of us are major volunteers for live music and in Washington state because WANMA [Washington State Music Association] is a Washington State endeavor. And, we have some Spokane venues who are involved, we have Tacoma venues.

**SHANNON 00:15:51**

So, yeah, we basically in that group, we do venue advocacy, where we try to engage with our elected representatives about what we need. So, whether that's unemployment stuff, stuff for staff, or it is talking about reopening guidelines, and how to have our voices heard in this process where they're designing guidelines for an industry they don't know anything about. We tried to get relief money from the State. So, I mean, that was—that took up a lot of my energy was engaging with elected officials, and having meetings and writing letters. I wrote a lot of letters, just to try to explain our industry to people, because I discovered that nobody knows what the live music industry is at all. And, certainly not people who work in government, they don't know anything about our business. And, so we were able to get venues qualified for the Working Washington Grants. As small businesses, there were some grant criteria that would disqualify venues in the way that they were written. So, like, there's been like four rounds of this grant making. So, by the third round, we had direct conversations with the Department of Commerce who were designing the grant criteria. So, I actually had a conversation with the Department of Commerce to design this, so that venues could be involved, and could be eligible. So, so, that was

huge. And, there are venues that got grants from that process, because we were trying to get —we were trying to get money from the Cares Act, to go directly to venues. And, we— were almost successful. I mean, we got— the head of the Department of Commerce, her son is in a band, Director Brown, and she was a big advocate for live music to the Governor directly. And, we got Senator Liz Lovelett. She's a State Senator for like the Anacortes area [Washington], and like Southern Bellingham [Washington], and she plays in a band, she's [?Inaudible?] a record store. So, she's a huge music fan. So, she became our, our legislature, champion, basically. And, so she got this, she circulated a letter amongst the Senate Democrats in the, in the House [Washington State Legislature], saying that they supported giving millions of dollars to venues, independently owned venues from these COVID relief funds. And, so she got 25 loans signed in like five days.

**EMILY 00:18:33**

So, she was a key, a key figure in the success that you've seen. So, it's like her [Senator Liz Lovelett] advocating for us to the Governor and the Department of Commerce, and amongst these other Senators and Representatives. And, then— then the venue owners doing things and WANMA doing things, all of that just like it made it known that we existed, because they weren't, we were not on their radar at all. And, I think that *(pause)* I mean, there's a lot you know, it's just like when you think of arts you think people just think Nonprofit [NPO], so they're either gonna think about the actual artists, or they're gonna think everything's a Nonprofit, and they don't necessarily think that for-profit, places like a music venue has anything to do with arts because I think music is often dismissed as entertainment. And, it's like, something that you consume. And, so we're just over in the business side and we don't have anything to do with culture. And, our venue workers really are not considered cultural workers. And, so, one amazing thing is that the King County 4Culture, in their round of funding for artists and cultural workers, they considered venue workers as cultural workers in the last round of funding, which was for Cares Act funds that they could give to individuals. So, in the winter, they gave grants and they consider many workers as cultural workers. So, that's the first time I've heard that— anywhere. And, so that's props to King County 4culture for understanding that the work we do— that we were part of producing culture. Yeah. Would you say that cultural workers are normally defined as artists?

**SHANNON 00:20:36**

Yeah. And, and, I think that, um, *(pause)* I mean, like, we have, you know, like, the lighting techs and the sound techs, and there are people that go through all this training, and it's real skill to do these jobs, you know, and I think that they don't really see them as cultural work. And, I think part of it is also that they don't work for nonprofits. Like there's something about the for-profit category that makes people think that it's not art in some way? Even though everything in our Capitalist culture is for sale. So, I don't know why it would exclude us but um, so I think that's just important, like part of the advocacy is getting people to understand what our businesses are and then to value our workers because they're invisible. Honestly, like the venue workers have been invisible in all of this, like even when they're talking about the hardest industries, they talk about restaurant and hospitality workers. And, yes, those people were hit really hard but venue workers were never mentioned. But venues are the first places to close and last to reopen. We're, we're gathering spaces!

**EMILY 00:21:56**

Everybody from security, right to bartenders to cooks. [SHANNON:Yeah] All the managers, all the ticket [SHANNON:Yeah] collectors. Yeah, all of it so, so that's been really important. So, I got to be like the voice for the venue worker which is really important to me. I did all of these *(pause)* it's part of my work for Keep Music Live Washington [Fundraising Campaign]also. So, out of WANMA Keep Music Live. And, so, WANMA, at this point is not like any sort of incorporated entity in terms of like, through Washington state or something, we're I just call us like a grassroots group of venue owners and workers and other music ecosystem stakeholders. But, so we couldn't raise money and set in certainly, like you can't raise money to give it to yourself, like, *(laugh)* you know, like a for-profit business can't really use a Nonprofit to raise money to give it to a for-profit. Washington has laws against that. And, also like, Washington State

can't give money to for-profit people with all of these funds, so like, because it's a pandemic, there are loopholes or like they made new rules or like this is an exception where we can actually give relief grants to for-profit businesses. So this is how Keep Music Live came to be a thing is that we formed an entity that could raise money and give it to for-profit businesses under the relief grants of COVID-19. So, that includes like for-profit. So, that includes Showbox that includes like Neumos and— Well Showbox is not included in any of these because we are not an independently owned venue and all the fundraising that we did was for independently owned venues under 1000 capacity. So, the Showbox doesn't, didn't get, like, we couldn't get the work in Washington grants. We couldn't get the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant. We couldn't get any of the KML to keep music live money. And, to be clear, Showbox is owned by AEG [Sports and live entertainment company], so it's not independent. [SHANNON: Correct.]

**SHANNON** 00:24:15

Yeah.

**EMILY** 00:24:17

Yep. So, before I get to Keep Music Live, I'll just backtrack for a minute and talk about REVS, which is Reopen Every Venue Safely. And, so that is a national program through the Music Policy Forum. And, Kate Becker, the King County Creative Economy director, she's on the board of Music Policy Forum. So, they dreamed up this program that had 11 pilot cities and so Seattle / King County was one of the 11 pilot cities. And, we were— basically tasking ourselves with creating reopening plans and also just talking about like, whatever it was that we needed to do during this pandemic. You know, so in some way, it's a little bit of like a support group (*laugh*) for, for industry people about how to keep our industry alive when we can't have any shows or do anything. So, we would meet weekly, and then became every two weeks, and we're still meeting like we've met, I think we're coming up on our, like, 28th session or something like that. And, so and that also, like the number of people has dropped down, it might have been like, 50 music ecosystem people, and now maybe like the same, like, 15 show up every time. But I mean, we had, we had, like a union rep, and we have venue owners and other workers and we had different government people would come in. What union rep. was it? Nate Omdal. [Musicians Association of Seattle, Local 76-493, AFM] Okay. And, that was with the Seattle musicians? Yeah. I forget the number of the Union, but I could look it up and tell you if you're curious. But yeah, I don't know. Are you familiar with Nate? No, I am not. Yeah, he's, he's around a lot. He's, he's awesome. So, if you want to talk about like, musician, workers stuff, he would be a great person to talk to. What's his last name? Omdal, O-M-D-A-L. He's a, he's an organizer for the union. He's a music teacher who plays music, he plays bass, is in a bunch bands. He's all over the place. Yeah, I'll give you his contact info. Or I'll just connect to you. Um, he, so who else was who's in REVS? I mean, we've had all these guest speakers. So, we'd have like public health officials come in, we've had, like, attorneys come in to talk about these different liability things and like, what might it look like to reopen or people going to sue venues if they get COVID. And, you know, like, just trying to figure out, like, what that landscape might look like? And, we've talked about mental health for staff and addiction things, and how are people coping during this time? And, you know, like, food relief, which I'll get into in a minute. Yeah, we're kind of all over the place. It's been, it's been really, really great. Like, we just keep having reasons to meet. There are endless issues to talk about. And, working together is, it's just easier to do it. And, then like, we talked about, like, how are you going to create a communications plan for when we reopen? Like, how are we going to communicate to artists, staff? And, the patrons who come in - like, what are the new protocols? And, how are we keeping people safe? And, that kind of stuff? So, yea. I'm wondering if you think these relationships that you've built and if these organizations are going to continue post pandemic? Do you think that there's still going to be work that you can do with WANMA, or Keep Music Alive? Or even REVS, you know, is that something that you feel is long term? WANMA is supposed to be long term, I almost said [*Inaudible?*] like WANMA. Yeah, we're, I think we're gonna incorporate and turn it into a real organization, like a trade association. And, so, yeah, I mean, honestly, like, I now know, people in other cities in Washington that I did not know before. I've connected with all these club owners or workers and even locally, where I might have known some of them a little bit, but we never worked together on anything. And, I think

that, like, that's the thing also, with a for-profit thing is like, everyone just sees themselves as their own entity, and they don't see themselves as part of an actual ecosystem, because we are, but I think that people just, you know, it's about competition. And, I think there's been a sea change in people's conceptualizations about what it is that we're doing here. And, like, what does this work for? And, how can we support artists better? And, how can we support our staff and what are we trying to do here? So, you're industry workers who are kind of like reconceptualizing their work and seeing it kind of more connected to people? No, like the owners. Like the venue owners. So, I think that's huge, because that can filter down into the workplace if they're serious. But if we all get together and we decide these are the types of trainings we want to offer our staff, we can do it together, you know. We could have some sort of cohesive—I don't know, like, vibe around what it is that we're trying to do, you know, and just less about, like, we're just competing over booking bands, you know, and I'm just trying to make my money over here, and I don't really care what we're doing so. So, I like to say that, you know, we see ourselves as the ecosystem that we always were, because I just see that it's just a shift in thinking. So, I'm, like, cautiously optimistic. I don't know if I'll use the word hope. But (*laugh*) Optimistic sounds good. Yeah. So, I don't know. I mean, I plan to be part of getting WANMA off the ground, like as a legitimate organization. And, I like to do the big picture conceptualization part. So, like, what's our vision? What are we trying to do? So, that's our next step. And, then we'll figure out like, what are the actual goals and who's going to be part of it. So, that will continue. I think, REVS will conclude when we reopen. But a lot of those people are also in REVS. So, I don't know, I think I've built really amazing relationships over this pandemic, which blows me away. It's like I've vastly increased my network and without leaving my bedroom. Oh, because of ZOOM meetings, right? I don't, it's crazy. It's crazy. Um, so I can tell you about Keep Music Live and the Showbox fundraiser?

**SHANNON 00:31:42**

Okay. So, um, (*pause*) WANMA kind of split off and did Keep Music Live, we gathered all these people, that are music lovers, basically, that have different skills. So, whether they were brand designers, marketers. fundraisers, we got a lot of fundraisers to come help out. And, just like, business people who love music, that have a network of people that have money, you know, like all just trying to figure out like, how do you mount a fundraising, like a major fundraising campaign in a couple of months, and like, tried to raise a lot of money to save these venues. And, so it was all volunteer. I mean, they hired a project manager and a campaign manager, but honestly, like, it's volunteer run, you know, and we really, really worked all the time, and it was really hard to raise this money. And, we raised quite a bit of money. And, I don't know if they're going to announce how much we raise. But I mean, we gave, 77 venues have already gotten funds. And, we're going to do a second round of fundraising, or not fundraising, but granting in June, I think. So, there'll be a second amount of money going out for grants. And, 77 Washington venues got funds from Keep Music Alive. So, it's amazing. Like what we pulled off in a year's time is unbelievable. Yeah, so and through that I met the most amazing people. And, I got to work with Sir Mix A Lot [Anthony Ray known as Sir Mix-a-Lot, is an American producer and rapper] He was one of our coach, fundraising co chairs. And, so he was on all those zoom calls. And, he is a really generous person. And, so kind hearted, loves his staff because he's got, you know, like these, some road people who've been with him for years and years, and he's really loyal, and is really concerned for their welfare without having work and he's really funny. So, that was sort of like a little unexpected thing that happened. That was great from Keep Music Live.

**EMILY 00:34:03**

And, did that fundraising culminate at an event? Or I guess I want to, I want to know a little bit more about that process of fundraising for 77 venues.

**SHANNON 00:34:17**

Yeah. So, basically, what we did is, first, the people that had connections with people, they reached out to see if we could start getting money and just as like major gifts, and then we started doing what we call the greenroom sessions. So, every month, we would have an invite only ZOOM session that had live music, we would pay artists to come on and sing a

song, and you know, say something about why live music is important and why independent venues are important to them. And, we would raise money and we would give speeches, so I gave the venue worker speech. As part of my, As part of my thing. So, I was on the, we call it the party planning committee. But we basically, we designed the fundraising sessions. And, so we would have different people come on and speak and different artists that everyone and sometimes we had themes and sometimes not. So, we did a lot of those. And, then, all of that money went for the first round of grants. And, then the second round of money is coming from our big kind of blow out Band Together Washington fundraiser [Live stream] that we did, which I think raised over \$200,000. I mean, it's just, it's amazing. Like, it's honestly, like, most of our donors are music fans. And, so and I think like, the average, I mean, the average donation amount is under \$100. So, we raise that much money by everyone just giving a little bit, we've had a lot of individual donors giving small amounts, and it made a difference just for music fans. They came out for music. Yeah, so that's great. So, I mean, Keep Music Live we'll be winding down because the Shuttered Venue Operators grant will be giving out money. And, so I mean, we never thought, I mean, we hoped that we would raise a lot but I think like the fund--we didn't really know what the fundraising scene was gonna be like. And, it's really hard to raise money during a pandemic for a for-profit business. So, the people who were really into it were the music fans. And, so they understood it, like you didn't have to sell them on it. They know why music live music is important. And, they know why these independent venues are important. And, so they just wanted to give because they want to come back to it. And, they want to, they want to make sure that these places are still there. And, so it wasn't, you didn't have to convince them. So, that was great. So, that'll be winding down. And, then the Showbox fundraisers. The first one, basically, someone reached out to me and said, G. Love of G. love and Special Sauce, [An American alternative hip hop band from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States.] wanted, he was doing these online concerts, like early in the pandemic, like it must have been like, April, May, he was doing like live Facebook, live things, Instagram Live. And, he would raise money and give them to venues that he played at that he really liked. And, so, Showbox was one of them. He wanted to do an Instagram Live thing for that. So, I forget when that happened, maybe in May of last year. He, he did one that actually raised the most money of any of the venues that, that he did, and so they sent us some money. And, so, I was thinking like, it's not enough money to give to people, because we have so many employees, like we probably have like 200, 250 part time employees, if you count the bar, as well, the bar staff, because they're a separate company, but they're in our venue. So, I consider them venue, our venue workers too. And, so, like, well, I can't send everyone like \$20 that's not really gonna be effective. So, what if we buy food instead? And, then *(pause)* at that time someone else reached out to me and said— I'm forgetting—I just spaced on his last name, I think it's Hamilton, Rob Hamilton. He is an illustrator. And, he said, 'I want to make a poster and sell the poster and I'll give you all the money for your stuff.' So, he did that and sent me a couple thousand dollars, so now I'm like getting up like a few, a few \$1,000--Yes?

**EMILY 00:38:52**

So, these are people that reached out to you? And, it was you reaching out to them, that is so interesting. Yeah, they did it. It was their idea and I just decided what to do with the money after that. And, so *(pause)* so we bought groceries, and what we did is we used the, *(pause)* the accounts through the bar, so they have like their, their wholesaler distributors, so we used— we bought the food through them so we could get the wholesale pricing and we could buy things in bulk and we bought gigantic like 50 pound bags of rice and beans and all of that and then we just got volunteers to come in and bag it up separately.

**SHANNON 00:39:40**

And, so we gave, I think it was about 60 people each time because we've done this twice now and so I mean people got like four bags of groceries. I mean they easily got like \$150 worth of food but if you went to a grocery store probably would have been twice that because we bought in bulk And, so then after we did that first one, and that was a big success, someone else reached out to me. And, they said that they wanted to make some masks with Showbox tickets on them, and then raise the money and give it to the Showbox. And, so I met them— because they needed to photograph the mass. So,



like, I found a couple employees that I know save tickets. And, we—I met up at one of their houses and and then the mask people came, Robin and Dusty Dunkel or the 'mask people' as I call them, so they showed up and we put this mask together, took some pictures, they this woman, Robin, she owns a boutique in Buren. And, so— she had them designed and printed and she sold the mask on her website. And, then she just sent me the money and I bought the groceries. And, the reason why they love the Showbox so much is because she and her husband met on the dance floor of a Showbox at a show, like 20 years ago or something. They are married and have two kids, but—so they love the Showbox so much. They said if Showbox gets torn down they're leaving Seattle. *(laugh)*

**EMILY 00:41:20**

And, so they raised like 1000 bucks from just like, selling masks?

**SHANNON 00:41:26**

Oh, no, they raise like *(pause)* I would have to look but I think it was like *(pause)* \$8,000? \$10,000? It was a lot.

[EMILY: Wow] Yeah. It was probably more like eight. Yeah, so we spent it all on groceries, we did another grocery day. And, so I bought, I tried to buy from local farmers, because these distributors, they have local companies. So, I wanted the money to stay in the community. So we're using local, *(laugh)* local distributors, local farmers and as much local stuff as I could find in their catalogs, so I was really conscious about how I spent the money.

**EMILY 00:42:14**

And, talk about like get, like really getting to people not only the workers, you know, at Showbox, but the people in the surrounding area in Seattle.

**SHANNON 00:42:26**

Yeah, that was really important to me, is that it, it stays here if possible. Like, it came from the love of the people in this community who wanted to give it to people in this community. So, I wanted to, like keep, keep the love going, you know.

**EMILY 00:42:41**

It's very innovative. Well, I mean, it's so, it's so smart not to be like, let's distribute the money evenly, but like, like, put it towards food, food drives, you know, like, [SHANNON: Yeah] and using, Yeah, wholesale, the network that you [SHANNON: Yeah] have to get wholesale prices.

**SHANNON 00:42:58**

Yeah, if I gave everybody \$50, there's not going to get a lot with that. And, yes, any cash is good. But like, if I turn that \$50 into, like \$300 worth of retail price groceries, like, it's so much better. And, so, I don't know, it's just really cool. Like people *(pause)* people felt the love, honestly, which they wouldn't have felt if I just handed them all \$50 or like, sent it to them electronically. But coming to the Showbox to pick up their food or getting it delivered; I had all these employees offer to deliver groceries to other employees who don't have cars and live too far away. And, so people would come, we would load up their cars and they would like go drive around neighborhoods and deliver groceries to people and people just felt loved and they didn't feel invisible, they felt like they were important. And, so that was really meaningful to me.

**EMILY 00:43:54**

Yeah. And, I think I would just say that Showbox has a very unique sense of community too, with their employees. So, that's something there as well.

**SHANNON 00:44:06**

Yeah, I think people (*pause*) I hope that people think that they're part of something and the Showbox is such an icon of Seattle and especially with the Save The Showbox campaign and thinking that we could lose it, makes it— even more precious to people. And, so I, and a lot of people have worked there for many, many years, decades, more whatever. I've worked there now for like 19 years. I don't know, it matters and all those relationships matter. And, I've really seen people step up for one another there and take care of each other and I have witnessed people who I know don't have any money and have unemployment issues. I know that they gave money to other employees who were really struggling. So, it's honestly like 'shirt off your back' stuff. I will give you the last of what I have, I'm going to give it to you, because you need it. Like I've seen that level of giving amongst our staff. And, it's like, you know, behind the scenes, people aren't doing it for any kind of recognition. I just happen to know about it because I am on the back show. (*laugh*) You know, like, but like, other people don't know about it, but I've seen it happen. And, it's important to me, and I don't know, just makes it, it makes me feel good. [EMILY: Yeah] That, I'm like working really hard for people who are also generous, you know, that they're going to share it.

**EMILY 00:45:38**

Right.

**SHANNON 00:45:38**

Yeah. Yeah.

**EMILY 00:45:41**

I think that kind of brings me to this question that is about AEG. I'm wondering what your, what's the communication like between that big corporation and Showbox like, have they been giving Showbox any support? Or is it really kind of detached from everything that's happening down in Seattle right now? Um, no, I mean, the office is AEG, so the office here— I mean, it's local people. It's not like it's all connected. It's not like, they're far away corporate overlords, like dictating stuff, like, I think it was.—I think that like, even like the higher ups who are in LA, or whatever, like, they were very communicative. They've made videos, you know, like these sort of town hall videos, to answer questions. And, in the three months, where I was still working, we had all kinds of meetings, like these big operations meetings, where we're trying to figure out like, how would this impact running shows, and we were trying to use the time wisely to get together and talk about stuff. So, we had tons of meetings, so I felt like that they were really part of it. And, I, what I thought was really cool is they, they paid all the part time staff for two weeks of shows that they were supposed to work that got canceled. So, they paid like, the last two weeks of March. They paid everyone as though they had worked. I remember that. Yeah. Cuz I guess paid for that, too.

**SHANNON 00:47:18**

It was so sudden. And, people were having problems with unemployment. And, there was just so unknown that they— I thought that was great. So, they paid that out. They let people cash out sick time, which is not required by law. So, that was, that was really cool. You could access it— if you needed it. And— and, I mean that they paid my health insurance while I was on furlough. So, that was a huge gift to me. So, I, you know, I was pleasantly surprised with— what kind of support that they offered during this time.

**EMILY 00:48:01**

Yeah, I'm surprised, too. Yeah, I know. I mean, I don't know. Yeah, they're, they're pros and cons of things. But I think I was, I was just pleasantly surprised. For sure. Um, so I think I just have two other questions. [SHANNON: Okay] One is just, if you know, people are watching this interview, and they want to get involved, or they want to help or, Yeah, or what would you say to them? Or what would be the best way for people to get involved in these organizations that you're talking about? Or what's most helpful during this time...? Everyone should get vaccinated. Yeah, that would be the most

helpful thing. Um, you know, I don't, I don't really know, because I don't know how WANMA— Like what, in terms of like, who can be part of WANMA, that kind of thing? Because I think there's an idea to have it be more than venue owners. So, like, Can we get artists involved? But I think that, that's too often unknown at this point. So, I don't know yet. There could be something really cool down the line. If people are in the music industry in some way and want to be part of this organization where we're going to try to make live music better in Washington state, we have a whole list of things that can be improved. Really? Like sustainability, I mean, but that's a whole nother thing. I will definitely be bringing that up. And, that's something actually, you know, interestingly, during the pandemic, there's been like, there's time for people to think, right? where people didn't have time to think before. So, there seems to be an interest in like, some sort of like climate neutral touring? which I think is interesting, where they're really addressing, like, they're going to address the waste of touring, and try to lessen the waste and do carbon offsets or something like that.

**SHANNON 00:50:29**

But, so I'm an AEG one Earth ambassador, and I had just, I had just started that program when the pandemic started, so I only have one meeting, and then— so I'm excited to rejoin and see what they're doing. But they're doing like huge waste audits, on all these venues. And, trying to figure out I mean, both like the waste stream, but then also,— you know, like, how do you power your venues and everything down to like, what kind of light bulbs do you have? I don't know, it just seems like they're, they're surveying to see what can be done to change it. So, I hope that people are going to be more committed to this type of stuff.

**EMILY 00:51:16**

And, just to clarify, so you are a One Earth Ambassador is that what is called? [SHANNON: Uh-huh] Title? And, so can you explain just briefly what that means with the AEG company? Yeah, so AEG has an environmental program called One Earth, and they do an application process for an ambassador. And, so they get people from different venues in different regions to be part of it. And, basically, it's a couple year commitment, and you do some project locally, in your community, that's an environmental type thing. And, then— I think a lot of it is like education on environmental. Not really policies, but I guess on—Well, they will call it sustainability. But I don't really like to use the word. Because I think it's a load of crap. Because we're not sustainable. And, I don't think we ever will be, but we like to think that like, we can just change like a little thing. And, then we can go, we can just continue on living the way that we live. But like, 'Oh, we have electric cars instead. But we can still drive all the time.' So, that's what sustainability is to me, like, all those get a different type of material that we can throw away. So, I just went off on a little tangent. *(laugh)* But, um, so I just say, Oh, so I don't know, I think like some of its educational in these meetings. And, then they just talk about ideas like ways to make their venues better. And, you do some sort of local project. So, that's basically what that Ambassador thing is. So, I'm stoked to be part of it. A little weird now, though, I'm sure.

**SHANNON 00:53:06**

Well, I'm just curious. I'm gonna watch their meetings. They're on video. So, I can go back and see what they talked about during the pandemic. But, but I don't know, there's like, just renewed interest like, and like, just how to get rid of all the single use, stuff like reuse at one time, I would throw it away.

**EMILY 00:53:24**

I hear you. Yeah. Yeah.

**SHANNON 00:53:29**

Well, yeah, so I don't know. I mean, like, Keep Music Live is kind of winding down. So, there's not really a fundraising call for that. So, I would just say, get vaccinated and go to shows. Find music.

**EMILY 00:53:42**

Support artists support more venues.

**SHANNON 00:53:45**

Buy art, buy music. Yeah. Tip your bartender when you go, because they've been out of work for a really long time. Yeah, be nice to everyone that's in the venue, because—

**EMILY 00:53:57**

They're all working hard. We're all working hard. And, we're all trying to figure it out together. And, we don't have all the answers and just be nice. Cool, thank you. Is there anything else that you think we might have missed in this conversation that you'd like to add?

**SHANNON 00:54:14**

Um, *(pause)* I don't really think so. *(pause)* I mean, there, there is one thing. I think like the equity component is really important because we talk about this a lot in our WANMA group, and REVS. And, I, you know, there's a lot of improvement that we can make in the music industry, for sure. So, whether you're talking race, gender, ability, any of that in terms of like hiring and who's in management and also creating spaces that are welcoming for all people. I think that's really important. So, when I think about, like, what are the things in the music industry that need to be improved if that's one of them. And, so I just think that's important that like, that's something that we're talking about. And, you know, just coming up with trainings for staff, you know, anti sexist anti racist trainings, I think that's super important. Because right now they have like, *(pause)* there's a lot of like, active shooter trainings and stuff, which is important and also depressing, because that's the world that we're in, but like, we don't really do anti harassment trainings. And, we sure should, you know. There's just a lot of things that need to be improved with our hiring and operations and stuff like that.

**EMILY 00:55:56**

So, there was a renewed focus on equity since like, Black Lives Matter. Since June of last year. [SHANNON: Absolutely]

**SHANNON 00:56:06**

Yeah. And, I think that it's having the space to think, and to talk. And, just like, it's just so horrific. And, I just think that like, the 'George Floyd' thing *(pause)* was, it was just so powerful. And, it really stopped people and it, like, in their tracks, and I think that, and then maybe just because everyone was sitting at home, everybody saw it, heard it, felt it. And, so it's not to say that, that hasn't, that police have been murdering black people for decades, you know. So, it's not to say that, like that was just the one incident because it wasn't, but it was one that everyone took notice of. So, yeah, started a lot of conversations. But I'm also really— people can use language to say they're doing things and they're not actually doing them. And, so, you know, it's like when you get the catchphrases like diversity, equity and inclusion, and then they just call it 'DEI' and then and then Okay, now we're gonna have a DEI person and blah, blah, blah. And, so you think that like, you can just create, like a thing in your company, and that's gonna, that's all the work you have to do. That's not, that's not the work, right? So, we have a lot of work to do, and we got to do the work. So, I want to do it in a way that's thoughtful and meaningful and that isn't performative, is the word, that they like to use now, you know, so that's really important to me. So, I'm hoping that we can do cool things with WANMA, we're sure gonna do cool things that Showbox because that I actually have influence over. And, so that's my commitment— moving forward.

**EMILY 00:58:20**

Yeah. Oh, man. Well, thank you so much, Shannon. I'll stop this recording. And, then yeah, say goodbye, but this has been awesome. Cool.

